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Housing Committee Public Hearing
March 4, 2014

Testimony of Kelly McDermott, East Hartford Housing Authority

SUPPORT SB 363

AN ACT TRANSFERRING FUNDS DEPOSITED IN THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT ACCOUNT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

TO: Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Butler and Members of the Housing Committee:

I would like to express my strong support for S.B. 363, An Act Transferring Funds Deposited in the Community Investment Account to the Department of Housing. I would specifically like to express my support for the annual allocation of \$150,000 to build the technical expertise and capacity of residents of public and assisted housing to participate in their communities.

As Director/Senior Manager of Planning & Modernization at the East Hartford Housing Authority (EHHA), I have worked very closely with residents in two family housing projects in the state-sponsored housing portfolio: King court and Veterans' Terrace. I have also worked very closely in this process with the Publicly-assisted Housing Residents Network (PHRN), a statewide resident-led organization dedicated to supporting tenants living in public housing. In the fall of 2011, EHHA made the decision to move forward with the sale and disposition of King Court. The Agency began working with residents, with its best attempt to incorporate the new state statute at 8-64c requiring resident participation in redevelopment. However, EHHA had few resources to build resident capacity and limited experience in community organizing.

In early 2012, EHHA reached out for assistance and the King Court resident engaged with PHRN. I came on board in August of 2012 when residents were fully organized and successfully brought the Agency and King Court Resident Association to an executed Resident Participation Plan by November 2012. King Court residents continue to be fully engaged in the process, having participated in selecting the developer and negotiating their key concerns, including the right to return and one-for-one replacement of affordable units.

As a result of this successful process and the realization that an educated resident leads toward better and more effective participation, the East Hartford Housing Authority invited PHRN to work with residents at Veterans Terrace, as we move forward in redevelopment of that property.

Providing residents with the support and resources to fully participate in their communities is critical to the success of Housing Authority redevelopment projects. PHRN staff and board have demonstrated that they have the skills, experience and vision to support residents to meet their goals in housing revitalization and ensure that residents' voices are heard clearly and constructively. I strongly support this effort to include a dedicated source of funding to make sure that this important work is continued.

Thank you.

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